

**Images of America**

**A Social and Historical Look  
at America Through the Movies**



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| Study Guide - On the Waterfront (1954)  Director : Elia Kazan  Stars :  Marlon Brando .... Terry Malloy  Karl Malden .... Father Barry  Lee J. Cobb .... Johnny Friendly  Rod Steiger .... Charley 'the Gent' Malloy  Preparation : Read the Approaches to Film article and the Article on Elia Kazan  Historical/Social Significance :  Accused of being anti-American and denounced by union leaders, On the Waterfront was mired in controversy at the time of its release, but it has stood the test of time and has emerged as a great portrait of a nonconformist who is not an informer but rather a man who experiences a moral transformation for the good of his fellow man. 1   Schulberg based the screenplay on a fascinating and heroic series of articles written by Malcolm Johnson for the New York Sun. What Johnson unearthed in his investigation of waterfront crime and later published in a 24-part series—following the murder of a New York hiring boss in April 1948—shocked America. The hard-hitting series, which won Johnson a Pulitzer Prize, described in detail the killings, bribery, kickbacks, thievery, shakedowns, and extortion that were everyday occurrences along New York's waterfront.   When Kazan took over the project, he had fallen into disfavor in Hollywood, chiefly because he had cooperated with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), as had Schulberg. Both had testified and "named names" before the committee.   Synopsis :  Terry Malloy works on the waterfront which is controlled by crooked union bosses, including his own brother.  Guided Questions for Viewing : Assessment questions will be based on the following :   * Do you think Terry was a hero for testifying? What parallels do you see with Elia Kazan testifying before the HUAC. * "Half a century had passed since his testimony, but Kazan bore nearly the whole onus of the era, as though he had manufactured its horrors - when he was surely its victim" Arthur Miller Discuss these comments by Arthur Miller with reference to the film. * "But the real reason the see *On the Waterfront* is for Brando. It's only possible to understand his impact on American cinema by observing what he does in *On the Waterfront*. Comment on what you thought of Brando's performance. Reference particular scenes of the movie in your answer. * Who "wins" at the end of the movie? * "You don't understand! I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am. Lets face it .... It was you, Charly." Comment with this quote in mind, how Terry's personal experiences helped shape his future actions.   Sources: 1. "Approaches to Film" http://course1.winona.edu/pjohnson/h140/waterfront.htm   Mills, Michael. "Elia Kazan, Postage Paid". http://www.moderntimes.com/palace/kazan/index.html (1999)   Dirks, Tom. "On the Waterfront". http://filmsite.org/onth |